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# Reviews

## in Molecular Medicine

### Clinical Implications of Genetic Defects in G Proteins

#### The Molecular Basis of McCune-Albright Syndrome and Albright Hereditary Osteodystrophy

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#### Introduction

Heterotrimeric signal transducing guanine nucleotide binding proteins (G proteins) couple extracellular receptor proteins to intracellular effector enzymes and ion channels, serving as critical mediators

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Abbreviations used in this paper: AC, adenylyl cyclase; ADP, adenosine diphosphate; AHO, Albright hereditary osteodystrophy; cAMP, adenosine 3',5'-cyclic monophosphate; DAG, diacylglycerol; FSH, follicle-stimulating hormone; GDP, guanosine diphosphate; GH, growth hormone; GHRH, growth hormone releasing hormone; GTP, guanosine triphosphate; IP<sub>3</sub>, inositol 1,4,5 triphosphate; LH, luteinizing hormone; MAS, McCune-Albright syndrome; PFD, polyostotic fibrous dysplasia; PHP, pseudohypoparathyroidism; PIP<sub>2</sub>, phosphatidylinositol 4,5-diphosphate; PKA, protein kinase A; PLC, phospholipase C; PTH, parathyroid hormone; PTHrP, PTH-related protein; TRH, thyrotropin-releasing hormone; TSH, thyrotropin (thyroid-stimulating hormone).

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of cellular responses to external stimuli. These proteins are a subset of a larger family of guanosine triphosphate (GTP)-binding proteins of differing molecular weight and subunit composition that share a common mechanism of GTP-binding and hydrolysis that regulates protein activity. G proteins are comprised of 3 subunits ( $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ , and  $\gamma$ ) each encoded by many different genes. The multiplicity of G protein subunits facilitates great combinatorial variability, which, in part, accounts for the ability of G proteins to interact with many different receptor and effector proteins. Over 100 G protein-coupled receptors have been identified. The receptors share a common serpentine structure consisting of 7 membrane-spanning domains, and detect extracellular signals as diverse as light, odorants, hormones, growth factors, and neurotransmitters (12). G proteins regulate many second messenger systems, including enzymes such as adenylyl cyclase (AC), phospholipase C (PLC), and phospholipase A<sub>2</sub>, as well as ion channels.

There are 2 classes of mutations in G proteins. *Activating mutations* in the gene (*GNAS1*) encoding the  $\alpha$  subunit of the G protein that stimulates AC ( $G\alpha_s$ ) have been identified in patients with McCune-Albright syndrome (MAS), a disorder characterized by increased hormone secretion and cellular proliferation of many endocrine tissues (141, 166). By con-

trast, *inactivating mutations* of the *GNAS1* gene are present in patients with Albright hereditary osteodystrophy (pseudohypoparathyroidism and pseudopseudohypoparathyroidism), a syndrome associated with resistance to multiple hormones that activate  $G\alpha_s$ -coupled receptors (91, 92, 122, 165). Experimental analysis of these 2 syndromes, which represent contrasting gain of function and loss of function mutations in the same gene, has extended our understanding of the clinical and biochemical consequences of dysfunctional G protein action and has provided a "bench to bedside" demonstration of the critical role that G proteins play in transmembrane signal transduction in humans. In this review, we focus on these 2 syndromes as a paradigm for understanding the clinical implications of altered G protein function.

### G Protein Structure and Function

G proteins share a common heterotrimeric structure consisting of an  $\alpha$  subunit and a tightly coupled  $\beta\gamma$  dimer. The  $\alpha$  subunit interacts with the G protein receptor and the  $\beta\gamma$  subunits, binds GTP, and possesses intrinsic GTPase activity (16). At least 16 genes encode mammalian  $\alpha$  chains; additional protein diversity results from the generation of alternatively spliced mRNAs. The distribution of some  $\alpha$  subunits is highly tissue specific (for example,  $G_{olf}$  is restricted to olfactory neuroepithelium), while other  $\alpha$  chains have a ubiquitous representation (for example,  $G_s$  is expressed in all tissues). The GTP-bound  $\alpha$  chain is able to regulate the activity of membrane-bound effector molecules that generate intracellular "second messengers." The  $\alpha$  subunits associate with a smaller group of  $\beta$  (5) and  $\gamma$  (10) subunits (51, 96, 133, 162). The  $\beta$  and  $\gamma$  subunits combine preferentially with one another (138, 139) and the resultant  $\beta\gamma$  dimers demonstrate preferred associations with specific  $\alpha$  subunits (133, 134, 162). Thus, combinatorial specificity in the associations between G protein subunits generates enormous diversity and permits exquisite specificity in the interactions of G protein heterotrimers with receptors (79). At present it is unknown whether specific G protein subunit associations occur randomly or if there are regulated mechanisms that determine the subunit composition of heterotrimers.

G protein activity is regulated by the binding and hydrolysis of GTP by the  $\alpha$  subunit (Figure 1). In the basal (nonstimulated) state, G proteins exist in the heterotrimeric form with guanosine diphosphate (GDP) tightly bound to the  $\alpha$  chain. Upon receptor activation, a conformational change occurs in the  $\alpha$  chain that facilitates the exchange of bound GDP for GTP, with subsequent dissociation of the  $\alpha$ -GTP

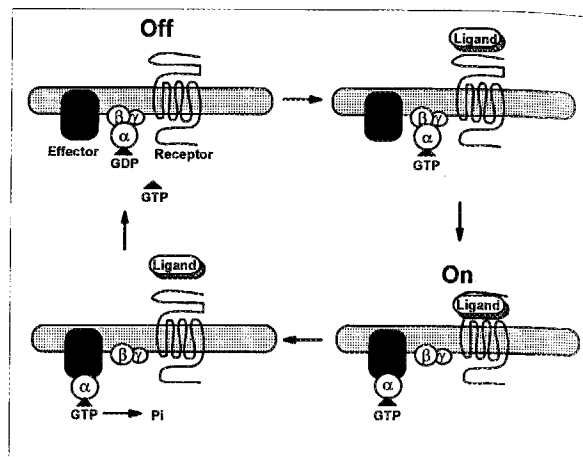


FIG. 1. The G protein GTPase regulatory cycle. In the nonstimulated ("off") state, the guanosine diphosphate (GDP) is bound to the  $\alpha$  subunit. The  $\alpha$  subunit is associated with the  $\beta\gamma$  dimer forming a heterotrimer (upper left). A ligand binds to a G protein-coupled receptor causing a conformational change in the receptor and G protein. The  $\alpha$  subunit then exchanges GDP for guanosine triphosphate (GTP) (upper right). After binding GTP, the  $\alpha$  subunit is activated (turned "on") and dissociates from the  $\beta\gamma$  dimer and the receptor. The GTP-bound  $\alpha$  subunit regulates multiple effector molecules (lower right). GTP is hydrolyzed to GDP by the intrinsic GTPase activity of the  $\alpha$  subunit (lower left). The inactive GDP-bound  $\alpha$  subunit reassociates with the  $\beta\gamma$  dimer and the heterotrimeric G protein is ready for another cycle of activation.

chain from the  $\beta\gamma$  dimer and the receptor. The free  $\alpha$ -GTP chain is now able to interact with effector enzymes and ion channels to regulate their activity. In addition, free  $\beta\gamma$  dimers modulate the activity of at least some effectors (for example, certain forms of AC and PLC) and participate in receptor desensitization (30, 78, 125, 126). The interaction of  $\alpha$ -GTP with the effector molecule is terminated by the hydrolysis of GTP to GDP by an endogenous GTPase. With hydrolysis of GTP to GDP, the  $\alpha$ -GDP chain reassociates with the  $\beta\gamma$  dimer and the heterotrimeric G protein is ready for another cycle of receptor activation.

X-ray crystallography and *in vitro* mutagenesis experiments have identified specific sequences in the  $\alpha$  chain that determine the functional and physical interactions of the  $\alpha$  chain with receptors, effectors, and  $\beta\gamma$  dimers. Moreover these studies have also defined regions that regulate binding and hydrolysis of GTP (11, 32, 57, 72, 84, 104, 115, 118).

Posttranslational modification of G protein subunits is required for both proper membrane localization and effective interactions with effector molecules. Coincident with G protein activation, all  $\alpha$  subunits (except  $G\alpha_i$ ) undergo lipid modification (palmitoylation) at a Cys residue near the  $NH_2$ -terminus. In addition, many  $\alpha$  subunits (for example,  $G\alpha_o$ ,

and  $G\alpha_i$ ) are myristoylated at an  $NH_2$  terminal glycine, a modification that increases affinity for  $\beta\gamma$  dimers. The  $\gamma$  subunits are modified at the C-terminus by attachment of a farnesyl or geranygeranyl group to a Cys residue (163). These posttranslational modifications of the  $\alpha$  and  $\gamma$  subunits are necessary for efficient G protein localization, coupling, and turnover.

### G Protein-Coupled Signaling Cascades

G proteins that are coupled to serpentine receptors regulate activity of membrane-bound forms of AC and PLC. There are multiple isoforms of both AC (65, 116, 154) and PLC (135) which can be distinguished by their tissue distribution and ability to interact with  $\alpha$  and  $\beta\gamma$  subunits. Activation of AC leads to synthesis of adenosine 3',5'-cyclic monophosphate (cAMP), the "second messenger" that activates protein kinase A (PKA). By contrast, stimulation of PLC leads to hydrolysis of phosphatidylinositol 4,5-diphosphate ( $PIP_2$ ) with the subsequent production of diacylglycerol (DAG) and inositol 1,4,5 triphosphate ( $IP_3$ ). DAG activates protein kinase C (PKC) while  $IP_3$  releases calcium from intracellular stores. Both PKA and PKC initiate protein phosphorylation cascades that result in diverse cellular and genomic effects.

Activity of AC is under dual regulatory control by G proteins. Activation of receptors coupled to  $G_s$  (for example, the  $\beta$  adrenergic receptor) leads to stimulation of AC and increased synthesis of cAMP (21, 22, 149). In addition, many cells express other receptors that are coupled to  $G_i$  (for example, muscarinic receptors) which when activated lead to inhibition of AC (53, 54, 75). Moreover,  $\beta\gamma$  dimers released by activation of  $G_s$  or  $G_i$  can also influence the activity of some forms of AC (30, 139, 153). Additional complexity derives from the observation that activity of several forms of AC are regulated by PKC, which is activated via the  $G_q$ -coupled PLC signaling pathway. Thus, AC acts as a coincidence detector, and its activity is determined by a complex and coordinate interplay between multiple G protein subunits and other regulators (for example, calcium-calmodulin).

In many endocrine tissues, synthesis of cAMP leads to increased hormone formation and cell growth via PKA-linked pathways. For example, in thyrocytes, thyrotropin (thyroid-stimulating hormone-TSH)-dependent stimulation of AC leads to activation of PKA, and the subsequent phosphorylation events lead to genomic (and nongenomic) effects that increase expression of the thyroglobulin gene and other genes important for thyroid hormone synthesis and thyrocyte growth (8, 108). These mo-

lecular events ultimately result in increased release of thyroid hormone and cellular proliferation (87, 160).

Similar to many other serpentine hormone receptors (for example, PTH, luteinizing hormone [LH], vasoactive intestinal peptide, calcitonin, glucagon-like peptide), the TSH receptor also stimulates the PKC phosphorylation cascade via  $G_q/G_{11}$ -dependent activation of PLC (8, 29, 40, 58, 160) (Figure 2). Binding of TSH to its receptor leads to activation of  $G_q$  and  $G_{11}$  which stimulate PLC. PLC subsequently hydrolyzes  $PIP_2$  to DAG and  $IP_3$  which activates PKC and increases intracellular calcium, respectively. Activation of this signaling cascade leads to thyroid cell growth but not hormone production.

As depicted in Figure 2, activation of the TSH receptor leads to the subsequent simultaneous activation of both the AC and PLC pathways, a process that facilitates crosstalk between these pathways. The  $\beta\gamma$  dimers released from  $G_s$  and/or  $G_{q/11}$  can modulate activity of certain forms of AC and PLC. Moreover, PKC can phosphorylate certain isoforms of  $G_i$  and AC, further influencing activity of these proteins. Additionally, the released  $\beta\gamma$  dimers activate  $p21^{ras}$ , a key G protein regulating the mitogen-activated protein kinase pathway (34, 39). Thus, crosstalk between signaling pathways refines the hormonal control of cellular processes as diverse as cell growth and proliferation, metabolism, and gene transcription.

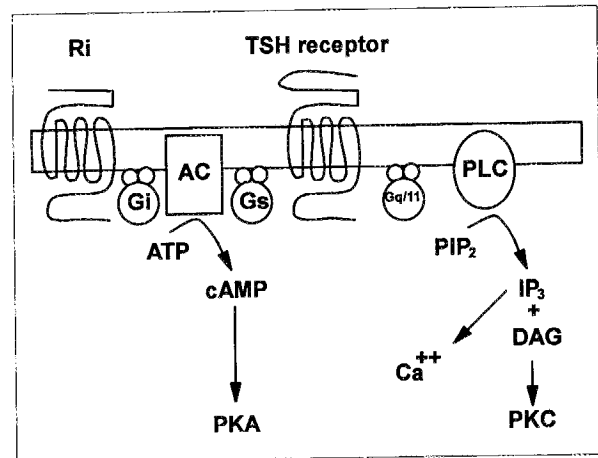


FIG. 2. Signal transduction pathways coupled to the thyrotropin (thyroid-stimulating hormone-TSH) receptor. The TSH receptor couples to the G proteins  $G_s$  and  $G_{q/11}$  to activate adenylyl cyclase (AC) and phospholipase C (PLC), respectively.  $R_i$ , a generic receptor for ligands that inhibit adenylyl cyclase, is depicted as coupling to  $G_i$ . The subunit structure ( $\alpha\beta\gamma$ ) of the G proteins and their interactions with effector proteins are described in the text. Abbreviations: PKA = protein kinase A; PKC = protein kinase C; DAG = diacylglycerol.

### G $\alpha_s$ Gene Defects

The human G $\alpha_s$  subunit is encoded by the *GNAS1* gene located on chromosome 20q13.1-13.2 (95). It contains at least 13 coding exons (81) and can be alternatively spliced to yield 4 different protein isoforms with similar biological activities (17). In addition, there are at least 2 alternative first exons that produce transcripts encoding 1) a truncated, non-functional G $\alpha_s$  protein that uses an initiator ATG sequence in exon 2 (69), and 2) a larger (92 kDa) protein, termed XL $\alpha_s$ , of uncertain function that is produced by the fusion of a novel 51 kDa protein to the protein encoded by exons 2 through 13 of G $\alpha_s$  (76).

Somatic and germline mutations in *GNAS1* that lead to either gain of function or loss of function have been identified in patients with disorders characterized by hormone-independent cellular proliferation or hormone resistance, respectively.

### Activating Mutations of G $\alpha_s$ in Oncogenesis

Vallar et al (158) initially described a subset of human growth hormone-secreting pituitary tumors that exhibited increased adenylyl cyclase activity in the absence of growth hormone releasing hormone (GHRH). Landis et al (86) subsequently identified the molecular basis for constitutive activation of AC as somatic mutations in *GNAS1* that resulted in the replacement of either Arg<sup>201</sup> or Gln<sup>227</sup>. These 2 *GNAS1* missense mutations, which convert the *GNAS1* gene to an oncogene termed *gsp*, enable the G $\alpha_s$  subunit to remain in the active, GTP-bound state. Such activating mutations occur in 8%-43% of growth hormone-secreting tumors.

Arg<sup>201</sup> is the site for ADP-ribosylation by *Vibrio cholera* exotoxin. This covalent modification inhibits the intrinsic GTPase of G $\alpha_s$  and results in ligand-independent stimulation of adenylyl cyclase (73). The subsequent accumulation of cAMP in intestinal epithelial cells is responsible in part for the secretory diarrhea associated with cholera.

Gln<sup>227</sup> corresponds to the cognate amino acid, Gln<sup>61</sup>, that is frequently replaced in the low molecular weight GTP-binding protein ras to convert it to an oncogene. Mutations in p21<sup>ras</sup> that replace Gln<sup>61</sup> are present in a variety of human tumors (39, 55). These mutations inhibit the GTPase activity of the p21<sup>ras</sup> protein and lead to constitutive activation of signaling pathways that are transforming in vitro (97, 131, 148). Arg<sup>201</sup> and Gln<sup>227</sup> are located in the G3 and G4 domains of G $\alpha_s$ , which correspond to domains that are required for GDP/GTP binding and intrinsic GTPase activation, respectively (10, 64, 119).

In addition to growth hormone-secreting pituitary

tumors, G $\alpha_s$  mutations are present in a subset of functioning and nonfunctioning benign and malignant thyroid neoplasms, but are rare in other endocrine tumors (Table 1).

### McCune-Albright Syndrome

#### Molecular basis of McCune-Albright syndrome

In 1937, McCune and Bruch (107) and Albright and associates (6) independently described a sporadic syndrome characterized by the clinical triad of polyostotic fibrous dysplasia, café au lait skin lesions, and endocrine hyperfunction now known as McCune-Albright syndrome (MAS).

Evidence suggesting that the basis for MAS involved constitutive (that is, hormone-independent) activation of the AC signaling pathway in affected tissues included the following: 1) cAMP is the critical second messenger leading to cellular proliferation and/or function in affected tissues, and 2) despite excessive activity of endocrine tissues, serum levels of the relevant regulatory or tropic hormones were either normal or decreased, suggesting autonomous function. Because each affected cell type expresses different receptors, a postreceptor defect in a protein that is present in all affected tissues was proposed as a unifying molecular etiology for MAS. The identification of activating mutations of G $\alpha_s$  in growth hormone-secreting pituitary tumors and autonomously functioning thyroid tumors made *GNAS1* an attractive candidate gene.

Mutations in *GNAS1* causing the replacement of Arg<sup>201</sup> [Arg<sup>201</sup> (CGT)→His(CAT) and Arg<sup>201</sup> (CGT)→Cys(TGT)] have been described independently by Weinstein et al (166) and Schwindinger et al (141) in DNA isolated from tissues obtained from patients

**TABLE 1. Clinical syndromes associated with activating mutations of *GNAS1*\***

McCune-Albright syndrome (100%)
Pituitary adenomas (8%-43%)
Growth hormone-secreting adenomas (14, 31, 85, 86, 100, 150, 158)
ACTH-secreting adenomas (14, 168)
Clinically nonfunctioning adenomas (14, 100, 155, 167, 172)
Thyroid neoplasms (3%-70%) (55, 56, 105, 109, 117, 151)
Hyperfunctioning and nonfunctioning follicular adenomas
Papillary and follicular carcinomas
Parathyroid neoplasms (<5%)
Parathyroid adenomas (14, 161, 169)
Adrenocortical disorders (<5%)
Aldosterone-producing adenomas (172)
Adrenal hyperplasia (169)
Pheochromocytoma (169)

\* Missense mutations of *GNAS1* and Arg<sup>201</sup> and Gln<sup>227</sup> that cause constitutive activation of adenylyl cyclase and the cAMP signaling cascade have been identified in patients with McCune-Albright syndrome and subsets of a variety of endocrine tumors.

with MAS. Cells containing these mutations are present in affected endocrine tissues, skin, and bone from patients with MAS. *GNAS1* activating mutations are not present in all cells of affected patients, however, even within affected organs. Mutation-bearing cells are distributed in a mosaic pattern, with the greatest number present in the most abnormal areas of affected tissues (141, 146). Moreover, the gene mutation is also present in cells not typically affected by MAS, including blood, liver, and heart (141, 145, 146).

These molecular studies have confirmed the hypothesis first suggested by clinical observations of variable involvement of endocrine organs and skeleton and a distribution of skin lesions coinciding with lines of embryologic development: that the genetic mutation in MAS is not germline but rather is a post-zygotic somatic mutation (60). The lack of documented heritability of MAS suggests that germline transmission of the mutation would be lethal.

#### *Clinical manifestations of McCune-Albright syndrome*

We reviewed the English literature by MEDLINE (National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, MD) search (1966–1995) and cross-referencing (1926–1995) and identified 158 reported cases of MAS. The clinical data are summarized in Table 2 and are discussed in detail below. It is difficult to determine the precise prevalence of clinical and endocrine manifestations of MAS from these studies owing to technical differences in diagnostic sensitivity over time, and a probable bias toward reporting patients with more severe or atypical manifestations of the disorder.

*Polyostotic fibrous dysplasia (PFD):* Nearly all

(98%) patients with MAS have solitary or multiple expansile fibrous dysplasia lesions. These lesions typically develop during the first decade of life (see Table 2), and can cause progressive deformity, fractures, and nerve entrapment. The femur and pelvis are most commonly involved. Radiographs of affected bones reveal expansile, lytic lesions with a "ground glass" pattern and a scalloped border secondary to endosteal erosion (62, 88). Bone histology discloses uniform, benign-appearing whorled bundles of fibrous tissue with embedded fiber-bone trabeculae. These lesions bear some resemblance to those found in hyperparathyroidism (osteitis fibrosa), but PTH levels are not elevated in MAS. Solitary lesions (mono-ostotic fibrous dysplasia) are present in a minority of patients with MAS.

Osteosarcomas occurred in some MAS patients (mean age, 36 yr) (44, 61, 62, 136). In most cases the patient died as a result of the osteosarcoma. Accordingly, patients with MAS should be monitored carefully for the development of osteosarcomas. These tumors are not associated with treatment of the fibrous dysplasia with external beam radiation therapy. It is not known whether these osteosarcomas represent malignant degeneration of fibrous dysplasia.

PFD also occurs in patients without MAS, and may be associated with the development of myxomas, sarcomas, and hyperparathyroidism (42, 44, 61, 62, 129, 136). To date, none of these lesions have been reported to contain a  $G\alpha_s$  mutation.

*Café au lait skin lesions:* Patients with MAS typically have 1 or more pigmented macules, termed café au lait lesions, that have irregular borders ("coast of Maine"). By contrast, café au lait skin lesions that occur in patients with neurofibromatosis (Von Rec-

TABLE 2. Clinical manifestations of McCune-Albright syndrome in 158 reported cases\*

Manifestation	Patients (n = 158)	Male (n = 53)	Female (n = 105)	Age at Diagnosis (yr) (Range)	Comments
Fibrous dysplasia	154	51	103	7.7 (0–52)	Polyostotic more common than monostotic
Café au lait lesions	135	49	86	7.7 (0–52)	Variable size and number of lesions, irregular border ("coast of Maine")
Precocious puberty	82	8	74	4.9 (0.3–9)	Common initial manifestation
Acromegaly/gigantism	42	20	22	14.8 (0.2–42)	17/26 with adenoma on MRI/CT
Hyperprolactinemia	23	9	14	16.0 (0.2–42)	23/42 of acromegalics with ↑ PRL
Hyperthyroidism	30	7	23	14.4 (0.5–37)	Euthyroid goiter is common
Hypercortisolism	9	4	5	4.4 (0.2–17)	All primary adrenal
Myxomas	8	3	5	34 (17–50)	Extremity myxomas
Osteosarcoma	3	1	2	36 (34–37)	At sites of fibrous dysplasia, not related to prior radiation therapy
Rickets/osteomalacia	4	1	3	27.3 (8–52)	Responsive to phosphorous plus calcitriol
Cardiac abnormalities	17	8	9	(0.1–66)	Arrhythmias and CHF reported
Hepatic abnormalities	16	6	10	1.9 (0.3–4)	Neonatal icterus is most common

Abbreviations: MRI = magnetic resonance imaging; CT = computed tomography; PRL = prolactin; CHF = congestive heart failure.

\* References provided in the text. Evaluations include clinical and biochemical data; other rarely described manifestations include metabolic acidosis, nephrocalcinosis, mental retardation, thymic and splenic hyperplasia, and colonic polyps.



klingshausen syndrome) have a smooth border ("coast of California"). The distribution of skin lesions in MAS is also characteristic: Lesions rarely extend beyond the midline, and the majority tend to be on the same side of the body as the skeletal lesions. They occur most commonly on the buttocks and lumbosacral regions. Happle (60) noted that lesions follow the lines of Blaschko, embryologic lines of ectodermal migration, producing an S-shaped pattern on the chest, a V-shaped pattern on the back, and a linear distribution on the extremities. This clinical observation led to the hypothesis that MAS represented a somatic defect with mosaicism (as described above).

**Endocrine abnormalities:** Endocrine disorders are common in MAS and are characterized by autonomous and excessive function of hormone-producing tissues (see Table 2). Serum concentrations of tropic or stimulating hormones are typically normal or reduced. The most common endocrine disorder is gonadal hyperfunction. Eighty-two of 133 (62%) patients reported in the literature who were evaluated for ovarian or testicular function were found to have abnormally elevated sex hormones with low or undetectable serum levels of gonadotropins (6, 13, 20, 28, 35-37, 43-46, 49, 50, 52, 61-63, 68, 77, 80, 88, 89, 98, 99, 102, 103, 106, 113, 127, 129, 130, 143, 144, 146, 156).

Precocious puberty is a common initial manifestation of MAS in girls, and is readily recognized by the development of secondary sexual characteristics prior to age 9 years. In general, estrogen levels are elevated as a result of excessive ovarian function, and serum levels of LH and follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) are low (88). Sex hormone secretion is typically not associated with follicular maturation and ovulation. Patients show prepubertal LH responses to infusion of GnRH, a characteristic of gonadotropin-independent precocious puberty (that is, precocious "pseudopuberty") (49). Benign ovarian cysts may occur, and surgical excision may result in regression of secondary sexual characteristics until the onset of normal pubertal development. As adults, these women are generally fertile, although they may have occasional irregular menses due to continued gonadotropin-independent production of estrogen (13, 88). Treatment of girls with MAS and precocious puberty with testalactone, an aromatase inhibitor, has been successful for short periods of time, but long-term (1-3 yr) treatment has been disappointing (45, 63).

Pituitary-independent precocious puberty also occurs in boys with MAS, but it is much less common than in young girls. Approximately 10% (8/82) of reported MAS patients with precocious puberty are male. Testicular biopsy in these cases reveals vari-

able degrees of seminiferous tube development and Leydig cell hyperplasia (101).

Growth hormone (GH) excess and/or hyperprolactinemia are common in patients with MAS (3, 4, 13, 19, 23, 28, 33, 35, 37, 44, 47, 52, 61, 66, 71, 80, 82, 83, 88, 89, 98, 99, 106, 111, 121, 127, 128, 130, 132, 144, 146, 147, 152). Many patients will also have features of acromegaly and galactorrhea. Gigantism in children and adolescents has also been well described. While the female:male ratio of MAS patients is approximately 2:1, increased growth hormone secretion occurs in approximately equal numbers of males and females (20 versus 22).

The biochemical behavior of growth hormone-producing pituitary tumors in patients with MAS is indistinguishable from that of sporadic tumors with and without *gsp* mutations. GH secretion is stimulated by thyrotropin-releasing hormone (TRH), GHRH, and sleep, and is incompletely suppressed by glucose administration (35). However, only 65% of MAS patients with growth hormone excess have radiographic evidence of a pituitary tumor, a much lower incidence than in sporadic cases of acromegaly (99%) (35). In addition, hyperprolactinemia occurs in over 50% (23/42) of MAS patients with elevated GH levels, a frequency somewhat greater than that occurring in patients with sporadic pituitary tumors (40%).

Pituitary pathology in patients with MAS includes adenoma, nodular hyperplasia, and mammosomatotrope hyperplasia. Surgery may be technically difficult if there is coexisting PFD of the base of the skull. Despite this potential complication, both open- and trans-sphenoidal hypophysectomies have been successfully performed. Adjuvant and primary therapy with external beam irradiation have also been reported (28, 66, 144, 147). Despite concerns regarding increased risk of developing osteosarcoma in regions of bone with PFD, no case of radiation-induced osteosarcomas has been reported in MAS.

Medical therapy with somatostatin analogs and bromocriptine has been shown to reduce tumor size and hormonal secretion in some, but not all, patients (23, 33, 47, 52, 80, 130, 147, 152).

Autonomous thyroid nodules and hyperthyroidism have been reported in 30 of 91 (33%) MAS patients who underwent thyroid evaluation (3, 4, 20, 36, 44-46, 48, 52, 62, 68, 82, 88, 111, 129, 132, 146, 173). Thyroid nodules have been treated by radioactive iodine ablation or surgery. The degree of hyperthyroidism is variable, and serum concentrations of TSH are typically low. The thyroid gland will often appear normal by physical exam, but nodules are nearly always detectable by sonography (48). Patients lack clinical or serologic evidence of autoimmune thyroid disease, and thyroid-stimulating immunoglobulins are undetectable.

Patients with MAS occasionally develop autonomous function of the adrenal gland and primary hypercortisolism (1, 9, 15, 37, 77, 106, 146, 173) at a young age (mean age, 4.4 yr). In contrast to pituitary-dependent Cushing disease, the elevated concentrations of cortisol are not suppressed by administration of high-dose dexamethasone, and serum levels of ACTH are low or undetectable. Adrenal gland histopathology reveals either nodular hyperplasia or solitary adenoma (106).

Hypophosphatemic rickets and osteomalacia can develop in patients with polyostotic fibrous dysplasia, with or without the MAS phenotype. Four patients with MAS have been diagnosed with osteomalacia or rickets (59, 77, 90). These patients have an abnormally low renal tubular maximum for the reabsorption of phosphorous per liter of glomerular filtrate (TmP/GFR), indicative of renal phosphate wasting and subsequent hypophosphatemia that leads to rickets or osteomalacia. The pathophysiologic basis for the hyperphosphaturia remains unknown. A similar clinical syndrome of hyperphosphaturia with subsequent osteomalacia or rickets occasionally associated with glucosuria and/or aminoaciduria has been described in X-linked hypophosphatemic rickets and in patients with various tumors of generally mesenchymal origin (oncogenic or tumor-associated osteomalacia). In patients with tumor-associated osteomalacia, renal transport of phosphate becomes normal after removal of the tumors, thus implicating tumor production of a humoral factor (41).

Two theories have been proposed to explain hyperphosphaturia in MAS: 1) the production of a circulating phosphaturic factor, termed phosphatonin (41), by fibrous dysplasia lesions; or 2) an intrinsic defect in renal tubular reabsorption of phosphate. Recent studies suggest that both hypotheses are plausible. Activating mutations of  $G\alpha_s$  have been identified in the kidneys of patients with MAS, and could result in excess generation of cAMP in proximal tubular cells and consequent reduction in TmP/GFR. Indeed, basal levels of nephrogenous cAMP are elevated in MAS patients with hypophosphatemia despite normal serum levels of PTH (174). However, these observations cannot exclude the possibility that a circulating phosphaturic factor is also present in MAS patients with hypophosphatemia. The occurrence of hypophosphatemic osteomalacia in patients with isolated fibrous dysplasia supports the notion that similar bone lesions in patients with MAS may elaborate a phosphaturic factor.

**Variability of tissue involvement:** The tissue distribution of the *GNAS1* mutation in patients with MAS is not limited to endocrine cells. Activating  $G\alpha_s$

mutations have been identified in peripheral blood leukocytes, liver, heart, thymus, and the gastrointestinal tract (141, 146). The presence of the *GNAS1* mutation in these tissues has in some patients been associated with clinical consequences such as hepatitis, cardiac arrhythmias, or intestinal polyps.

The variable clinical involvement of different tissues in patients with MAS likely reflects several biological effects. First, the *GNAS1* gene is mutated early in embryogenesis and therefore is distributed among a mosaic population of cells. The proportion and distribution of affected cells in a tissue will be determined by the precise stage in development in which the mutation occurred. Thus, mutational events that occur later in embryogenesis are likely to give rise to fewer mutant cells, and a milder phenotype, than mutational events that occur very early. A second determinant of clinical phenotype is based on the variable ability of cAMP to induce proliferation in different cells. Thus, mutational activation of  $G\alpha_s$  will be most consequential in those tissues in which cAMP can stimulate cellular proliferation and/or hormone secretion. cAMP is not mitogenic in most cell types, and in some cell types cAMP can actually inhibit growth. For example, cAMP is not growth-promoting in fibroblasts, a model system commonly used to study growth regulation. Moreover, increased cAMP and activation of the PKA signaling cascade in NIH3T3 cells has been shown to reverse the transformed phenotype induced by activated p21<sup>ras</sup> (27, 39). Third, even in cells in which cAMP is a strong growth stimulator, counter-regulatory responses (such as increased cAMP phosphodiesterase activity [39, 114, 171]) may occur that can mitigate or even reverse the activated  $G\alpha_s$  phenotype. Thus, a second genetic "hit" may be required for the development of autonomous nodules in some tissues, while in others, persistently elevated levels of cAMP may be sufficient to alter cellular phenotype. In fact, it is unknown whether the autonomous nodules in MAS patients represent the proliferation of mosaic rests of cells harboring the *gsp* mutation or if they result from the acquisition of additional gene mutations.

A more severe form of MAS characterized by jaundice, hepatitis, extramedullary hematopoiesis, gastrointestinal polyps, thymic hyperplasia, acute pancreatitis, neurodevelopmental disorders, and sudden cardiac death has been described (146). By extension, this unusually severe syndrome demonstrates the wide variety of cell types that are dependent on  $G_s$ -coupled receptors for normal function and are positively regulated by cAMP. The percentage of cells harboring the mutation may be greater than in the usual form of MAS, accounting for the more severe phenotype described in this group of patients.



### Albright Hereditary Osteodystrophy, Pseudohypoparathyroidism, and Pseudopseudohypoparathyroidism

In 1942, Fuller Albright (5) described a group of patients with clinical and biochemical features of hypoparathyroidism (that is, hypocalcemia and hyperphosphatemia) who did not show a phosphaturic response to injected parathyroid extract. He suggested that hypoparathyroidism in these patients was not caused by a deficiency of parathyroid hormone (PTH) but was due to end organ resistance to PTH, and termed this condition "pseudo"-hypoparathyroidism (PHP). Thus, Albright was the first to recognize a human disease due to deficient responsiveness to a hormone by otherwise normal target organs. Albright also noted that these patients had a distinctive constellation of developmental and skeletal defects, including a round face, short stature, brachydactyly (shortened metacarpal and metatarsal bones), obesity, heterotopic ossifications, and mental retardation. Albright later identified other subjects who had many of these developmental defects but who lacked clinical evidence of hormone resistance; he termed this disorder "pseudo"-pseudohypoparathyroidism (pseudoPHP) to emphasize the physical similarities but biochemical differences between these patients and patients with PHP (7). This constellation of skeletal and developmental abnormalities, with or without hormone resistance, is now termed Albright hereditary osteodystrophy (AHO).

### Molecular basis of PHP and AHO

The first clues to the molecular basis for hormone resistance in PHP came from the demonstration by Chase and Aurbach that the actions of PTH on its target organs, bone (25) and kidney (24), are mediated by cAMP. PTH infusion in normal subjects leads to increased urinary excretion of nephrogenous cAMP (26). By contrast to patients with idiopathic or postsurgical hypoparathyroidism, patients with PHP show a markedly blunted urinary cAMP response to exogenous PTH, whereas patients with pseudoPHP show a normal response (26). These observations have permitted the classification of PHP into type I and type II: In PHP type I, both the nephrogenous cAMP and phosphaturic response to PTH is blunted, whereas in PHP type II, a much less common variant of PTH resistance, there is a normal nephrogenous cAMP response to PTH infusion but a diminished phosphaturic response. These responses suggested that the defect in PHP type I was in the PTH receptor-adenylyl cyclase system, whereas the defect in PHP type II was likely to be in a more distal component of the cAMP signaling pathway. Subsequent clinical and biochemical studies have led to a further refinement in the classification of patients with PHP (Table 3).

Patients with PHP type Ia and their family members with pseudoPHP have an approximately 50% reduction in  $G_{\alpha_s}$  activity, as determined by functional assays of membranes from a variety of freshly obtained tissues and cultured cells, including red blood cells (94) and cultured fibroblasts (123). In

**TABLE 3. Clinical and molecular characteristics of patients with Albright hereditary osteodystrophy (AHO) and pseudohypoparathyroidism (PHP)\***

	Molecular Defect	Inheritance	AHO	Hormone Resistance	Response to PTH
AHO phenocopy	del 2q37	Sporadic	Yes	No	Normal
PseudoPHP	Various mutations in $G_{\alpha_s}$	AD		No	Normal
PHP Ia		? imprinting	Yes	Multiple	Blunted $\uparrow$ cAMP Blunted $\uparrow$ TRP
PHP Ib	No mutations in PTH/PTHrP receptor	AD	No	PTH only	
PHP Ic	? adenylyl cyclase	AD	Yes	Multiple	
PHP II	? vitamin D status	Sporadic	No	PTH only	Blunted $\uparrow$ TRP

Abbreviations: AD = autosomal dominant; PTH = parathyroid hormone; cAMP = cyclic AMP; PTHrP = PTH-related protein.

\* Patients with the AHO phenotype may have identical  $G_{\alpha_s}$  mutations associated with (PHP Ia) or without (pseudoPHP) hormone resistance in the same family, but not in the same generation. Each family has a unique mutation (see Table 4 and Figure 3). Less commonly, patients may have isolated resistance to PTH as defined by the absence of urinary cAMP and phosphaturic (TRP) responses to PTH infusion (PHP Ib and II); these patients do not have the AHO phenotype and the genetic defects are unknown. Rare patients with the AHO phenotype and hormone resistance but without a  $G_{\alpha_s}$  mutation have been described (PHP Ic). The molecular cause is unknown. The inheritance patterns are variable.

most cases, these functional deficiencies are correlated with decreased levels of  $G\alpha_s$  mRNA, as measured by Northern blot analysis (91), and reduced  $G\alpha_s$  protein, as measured by quantitative immunoblot analysis (123). However, in some cases levels of  $G\alpha_s$  mRNA and  $G\alpha_s$  protein are normal despite reduced  $G\alpha_s$  bioactivity (91). Molecular analysis has revealed that a unique heterozygous *GNAS1* gene mutation accounts for  $G\alpha_s$  deficiency in each kindred studied (Table 4, Figure 3). These various mutations include an initiator codon mutation (122), missense mutations (110, 165), mutations in sequences necessary for correct splicing (110), and small deletions (120, 164).

In patients with PHP type Ib hormone resistance is limited to PTH. Thus, it was hypothesized that PHP type Ib patients would have genetic defects in the PTH/PTHrP receptor. However, careful analyses of the PTH/PTHrP receptor gene (137) and mRNA (Ding and Levine, unpublished results) from PHP type Ib patients have failed to identify any mutations in the coding sequences. More recently, linkage analysis of a silent polymorphism in the PTH/PTHrP gene in several families with PHP type Ib has shown that the PTH/PTHrP receptor is not linked to inheritance of PHP type Ib (Ding and Levine, unpublished results). Although it is generally accepted that the PTH/PTHrP receptor is the physiologically important receptor for PTH action, a second gene encoding a PTH receptor with different signaling properties has recently been identified (157).

#### *Inheritance of AHO and hormone resistance*

Early clinical studies of AHO demonstrated a female:male ratio of 2:1 among affected individuals, which led to the suggestion that AHO is an X-linked disorder. However, the description of a family in which male to male transmission occurred (159), and the subsequent localization of the human *GNAS1* gene to chromosome 20 (95) have led to the conclusion that AHO is inherited in an autosomal dominant fashion with sex modification (159) (see Table 3).

Patients with PHP type Ia and patients with pseudoPHP are frequently present in a single family, but PHP type Ia and pseudoPHP do not occur in the same generation. This observation has argued against random, as well as some nonrandom (for example, metabolic interference [70]), mechanisms as the basis for the AHO phenotypes. Moreover, in most families inheritance of  $G\alpha_s$  deficiency from the father leads to pseudoPHP whereas inheritance from the mother leads to PHP type Ia. This pattern of inheritance has suggested that genomic imprinting may be involved in determining whether patients with AHO have hormone resistance (that is, PHP type Ia) or hormone responsiveness (that is, pseudoPHP) (38). However, several lines of evidence now argue against this theory: 1) in 1 reported family (140) inheritance of  $G\alpha_s$  deficiency from either a father or mother led to hormone resistance (that is, PHP type Ia) in the affected children; 2) both  $G\alpha_s$  alleles are expressed in a variety of human fetal tis-

**TABLE 4. Mutations of *GNAS1* described in patients with Albright hereditary osteodystrophy\***

Mutation	$G\alpha_s$ mRNA	$G\alpha_s$ Protein	$G\alpha_s$ Bioactivity	Comments (Reference)
Met <sup>1</sup> →Val A→G	~100%	↓, abnl	~50%	(122) Acceptor splice: intron 3, unpublished
43-bp deletion	ND	ND	81%	Exon 4 (120)
Leu <sup>91</sup> →Pro	ND	~50%	ND	(110)
Arg <sup>165</sup> →Cys	~100%	~50%	ND	(110)
Tyr <sup>190</sup> →Asp				Unpublished
4-bp deletion	~50%	ND	ND	Exon 7 (164)
4-bp deletion	~100%	~50%	ND	Exon 8 (110)
G→C	↓	ND	ND	Donor splice: intron 10 (165)
1-bp deletion	ND	ND	ND	Exon 10 (165)
Ala <sup>366</sup> →Ser	ND	nl 33° ↓ 37°	↑ 33° ↓ 37°	Testotoxicosis (67)
Alle <sup>381</sup> Arg <sup>385</sup> →His	ND	~100%	41%	Unpublished Uncoupled (142)

Abbreviations: abnl = abnormal; ND = not determined; nl = normal.

\* A unique *GNAS1* mutation has been identified in each family with members affected with Albright hereditary osteodystrophy. The relative amounts of  $G\alpha_s$  gene transcribed into mRNA and translated into protein as well as the bioactivity of the mutant protein products are variable. Figure 3 displays the *GNAS1* mutations and the positions of the mutation in the protein.

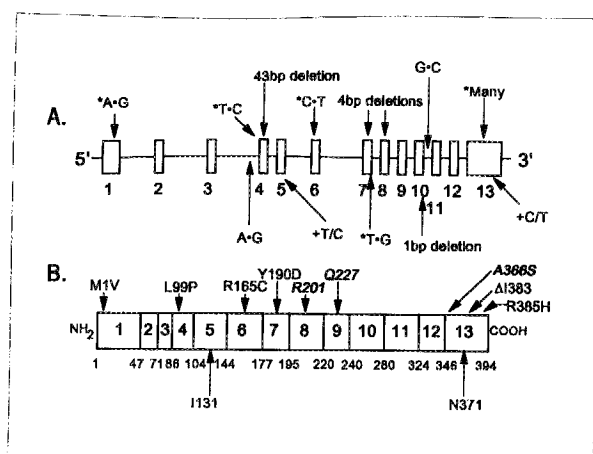


FIG. 3. Mutations in the *GNAS1* gene. Panel A depicts the human *GNAS1* gene, which contains at least 13 exons and 12 introns and spans over 20-kilobase pairs. Thirteen unique mutations that result in loss of  $G\alpha_s$  function have been identified in 13 unrelated Albright hereditary osteodystrophy (AHO) families; missense mutations are denoted by the symbol \*. Panel B depicts the position of these mutations above the protein structure. Two polymorphisms are denoted by the symbol + in panel A, and the position of the unchanged amino acid is denoted beneath the predicted  $G\alpha_s$  protein in panel B. The sites of 2 missense mutations that result in gain of function found in McCune-Albright syndrome and in some sporadic endocrine tumors are depicted in italics in panel B. The effects of the mutations in AHO patients are summarized in Table 4 and in the text.

sues (18), cultured fibroblasts (110), and ovarian tissue (Namdoun and Levine, unpublished); 3) in all tissues/cells that have been examined, levels of  $G\alpha_s$  protein and activity are similarly reduced in patients with or without hormone resistance (123).

An AHO-like phenotype has also been described in several individuals in association with a deletion in chromosome 2q37.2 (124, 170). These patients have brachydactyly and short stature but lack evidence of heterotopic ossification. Immunoreactive  $G\alpha_s$  is normal and there is no evidence of hormone resistance (124). This newly described syndrome may represent a phenocopy of the developmental defects that occur in patients with AHO due to  $G\alpha_s$  deficiency. Identification of the gene(s) missing in these individuals may lend insight into the pathophysiologic basis for AHO in PHP type Ia.

#### Clinical variability of AHO

Subjects with  $G\alpha_s$  deficiency manifest considerable variability in the clinical presentation of AHO, even in affected members of the same family. Whereas patients with pseudoPHP typically have normal intelligence, patients with PHP type Ia show a spectrum of cognitive function ranging from normal to profoundly impaired. Obesity and skeletal

dysplasias such as round facies, short stature, and brachydactyly may be obvious in some subjects and subtle (or even absent) in others. Subcutaneous ossifications are present in approximately one-half of patients with  $G\alpha_s$  deficiency, and are unrelated to hypocalcemia or hyperphosphatemia.

There does not appear to be a correlation between the expression of AHO and the extent of hormone resistance, suggesting a direct effect of  $G\alpha_s$  deficiency on skeletal development. Recent studies of the receptor for PTH provide some insights into the nature of this effect. There is a single receptor for both PTH and PTH-related protein (2). Transgenic mice in which both alleles of the gene encoding PTHrP are disrupted develop severe skeletal dysplasias that are fatal in the neonatal period (74). Thus the role of  $G\alpha_s$  in development of AHO may be more related to skeletal resistance to PTHrP than to PTH.

Patients with PHP type Ia manifest target organ resistance not only to PTH but also to additional hormones that activate adenyl cyclase. Most patients have subclinical hypothyroidism with a low or low normal serum concentrations of thyroxine. Basal levels of serum TSH are generally elevated and show an exaggerated response to TRH. The thyroid gland is not enlarged despite elevated serum concentrations of TSH. Clinically significant hypothyroidism occurs in some patients, and may provide the initial clue to a diagnosis of PHP type Ia (93). Women with PHP type Ia frequently have abnormal ovarian function and in some cases have elevated serum levels of gonadotropins and show exaggerated LH and FSH responses to administered GnRH. Remarkably, patients with PHP type Ia do not show abnormal responses to all hormones that stimulate adenyl cyclase. For example, PHP type Ia patients have normal physiologic responses to ACTH, vasopressin, and glucagon, suggesting (at least in the case of the hepatic response to glucagon) that in some tissues submaximal increases in intracellular cAMP are adequate to generate a physiologic hormone response (112).

Several features of the variability in hormone resistance in different target tissues remain to be explained: 1) hormone resistance does not occur in all tissues in which receptor activation leads to stimulation of adenyl cyclase; 2) hormone resistance does not occur in the same target tissues in all patients; and 3) not all patients with AHO and deficiency of  $G\alpha_s$  have hormone resistance (pseudoPHP).

#### Summary

Inactivating and activating mutations in the gene encoding  $G\alpha_s$  (*GNAS1*) are known to be the basis for 2 well-described contrasting clinical disorders,

Albright hereditary osteodystrophy (AHO) and McCune-Albright syndrome (MAS). AHO is an autosomal dominant disorder due to germline mutations in *GNAS1* that decrease expression or function of  $G\alpha_s$  protein. Loss of  $G\alpha_s$  function leads to tissue resistance to multiple hormones whose receptors couple to  $G\alpha_s$ . By contrast, MAS results from postzygotic somatic mutations in *GNAS1* that lead to enhanced function of  $G\alpha_s$  protein. Acquisition of the activating mutation early in life leads to a more generalized distribution of the mosaicism and is associated with the classic clinical triad of polyostotic fibrous dysplasia, endocrine hyperfunction, and café au lait skin lesions described in MAS. Acquisition of a similar activating mutation in *GNAS1* later in life presumably accounts for the restricted distribution of the *gsp* oncogene, and is associated with the development of isolated lesions (for example, fibrous dysplasia, pituitary or thyroid tumors) without other manifestations of MAS. Tissues that are affected by loss of  $G\alpha_s$  function in AHO are also affected by gain of  $G\alpha_s$  function in MAS, thus identifying specific tissues in which the second messenger cAMP plays a dominant role in cell growth, proliferation, or function. Further investigations of the functions of  $G\alpha_s$  and other members of the GTPase binding protein family will provide more insight into the pathogenesis and clinical manifestations of human disease.

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